



USN MOVES TO MODIFY SUPER HORNET FOR BLUE ANGELS ROLE

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The US Navy has started a process to replace the **Blue Angels** demonstration team's aircraft with a squadron of **Boeing F/A-18E Super Hornets**.

Boeing will receive a contract to draw up the engineering plans needed to convert the single-seat Super Hornet into a configuration specific to the Blue Angels role, the navy said in a 3 December acquisition notice.

The engineering work will support engineering change proposal 6480, which is entitled, "Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron (Blue Angels) Super Hornet Conversion", the acquisition document shows.

The Blue Angels squadron is composed of a mix of one-seat F/A-18As and Cs and two-seat F/A-18Bs and Ds. The F/A-18A/B Hornets replaced the Douglas A-4 Skyhawk as the Blue Angels aircraft in 1986, and recently have been showing their age. Structural panels escaped from two different F/A-18As in aerial demonstrations a week part in late May and early June.

Since 2010, the navy has been moving F/A-18C/Ds into the squadron, but now the service is considering moving the Super Hornet into the role.

To perform the Blue Angels role, the F/A-18E will likely need similar design changes that the navy has performed on the original Hornet fleet.

These included removing the fighter's gun and missile launchers, installing flight auxiliary fuel

pumps that can operate in sustained inverted manoeuvres and inserting an oil pump in the tail to emit blue smoke. Also, a spring is added to the control stick for better handling in formation and inverted flight.

Though sharing a common naming and design heritage as the classic Hornets, the F/A-18E would mark a significant change for the Blue Angels. The Super Hornet is 25% larger and has 40% more range than the F/A-18C/D, making the aircraft substantially larger.

A note on the Blue Angels' official web site cites the Super Hornet's extra heft as one reason why the older model is favoured for the public demonstration role.

"While the Super Hornet has more recent technology, the Hornet is more suitable to the needs of the current team due to its light weight and slick manoeuvrability," the navy document says.

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